

Albert Hamilton Brevard House  
1239 First Street  
New Orleans  
Orleans Parish  
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1118

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Washington Planning and Service Center  
1730 North Lynn Street  
Arlington, Virginia

## ALBERT HAMILTON BREVARD HOUSE

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Street Address: 1239 First Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish,  
Louisiana

Present Owner: Judge John Minor Wisdom, 1239 First Street,  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Present Occupant: Judge J. M. Wisdom and Family

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: The Brevard House is similar in general concept and in many details to a great number of large, impressive, pre-Civil War Garden District homes, such as the Dabney House (HABS No. LA-1113) at 2265 St. Charles Avenue, which was built in the same year by the firm of Gallier, Turpin, and Company.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

## 1. Original and subsequent owners:

2 Sept. 1852 - Albert H. Brevard purchased property from Francois d'Alqim (J. Agassie or Agaisse)

(Contract for construction on January 3, 1857)

c. 1859 - inherited by Elizabeth Brevard Woods at death of father

13 July 1869 - sold by James Brison Woods (whose first wife was Elizabeth Brevard) to Emory Clapp

1881 - inherited by Pamela Clapp, widow of Emory Clapp (Mrs. Clapp lived here until her death in 1934)

25 Feb. 1935 - Mrs. Rebecca Smith, wife of Buckingham Chandler, purchased from Mrs. Lily Clapp, widow of Charles B. Amory

16 June 1947 - purchased by John M. Wisdom and Bonnie Mathews (his wife) for \$55,000 from Mrs. Frank Brostrom (Mrs. Smith).

## 2. Date of erection: 1857.

3. Architect: James H. Calrow.
4. Builder: Charles Pride "Esq., Master Builder, Contractor, & Undertaker of this City" (Building contract of 3 Jan. 1857). HABS  
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5. Notes on original plan and construction of building: Building Contract Records of W. H. Peters (3 Jan. 1857. Vol. 4 #2 MOB 69/98) can be found in the New Orleans Notarial Archives:

"Charles Pride Esq. Master Builder, Contractor & Undertaker of this City . . . and Albert Hamilton Brevard Esq. also of this city (for \$13,500) (Pride) convents, contracts & agrees to undertake, set up, erect, build & finish & furnish the materials therefore, an edifice or Dwelling house . . . in strict conformity to . . . certain plans & drawings marked A B & C . . . & in accordance with the specifications which follow (at Camp & Chestnut, Philip & First).

"Specifications of Labor workmanship &c necessary to be used in the erection of a two story brick building or Dwelling for A. H. Brevard Esq., the whole to be done in accordance with the accompanying plans and elevations with figured dimensions as made by James H. Calrow on 6<sup>th</sup> Dec./56 & identified with these specifications - in the most workmanlike manner in every part fit for occupation . . ."

6. Notes on alterations and additions: Soon after the Clapps acquired the house in 1869, the hexagonal library with bedroom above and grillwork gallery was added to the Chestnut Street side. Extensive repairs were made both by Mrs. Brostrom after she acquired the building in 1935, and Judge and Mrs. Wisdom after 1947. Air-conditioning was added c. 1959. At the time of this recording (June 1964) the dining room was being redecorated.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:  
Brevard House, 1239 First Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.  
Personal interview with Judge and Mrs. John Minor Wisdom. June 1964.  
Building contract of 3 January 1857 recorded in the notarial records of W. H. Peters (Vol. 4 #2 MOB 69/98); Notarial Archives, Civic Center, Loyola Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.
2. Secondary and published sources:  
Samuel, Martha and Ray. The Great Days of the Garden District. New Orleans: Parents' League of the Louise S. McGehee School, 1961.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Brevard House is a particularly fine example of the large, narrow and long, two-story residences built in the Garden District in the prosperous decade that preceded the Civil War.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is structurally sound and all materials are in excellent condition.

B. Detailed Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories, 30'-4" (three-bay front) x 130'-3 1/4". The main block is 30'-4" x 63'-10 1/4" with long, narrow rear wing and hexagonal side wing.
2. Wall construction: 14" stuccoed brick bearing walls.
3. Foundations: Brick.
4. Porches: The First Street facade has a tetrastyle, two-level entry porch with four square end columns, four round columns, and ornamental iron grillwork. The two centrally located round columns of the first level are of the Ionic order, and those of the upper level are of the Corinthian order. A small, two-level, wrought-iron porch on the Chestnut Street side leads into the "hexagonal" library wing. This porch and a larger, two-level porch on the southeast garden side of the main block are both fairly typical of the wrought-iron porches added to New Orleans domestic structures in the mid-nineteenth century. The two-level galleries on the southeast garden side of the two-part rear wing are of wooden construction and are less elaborate than the porches visible from the street.
5. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys with stucco are at either stepped gable end of the main block. There is also a high, stuccoed brick chimney with panels over the "hexagonal" library wing. The rear wing has three lower brick chimneys.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The double wooden main entry doors, which fold back into a small "vestibule," are surrounded by a wide Greek Revival architrave with crossettes and crowned by a narrow molding and a low

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pediment with decorative scrollwork and acroterion. This doorway with its architrave and pediment is similar to several of the prominent first-floor interior doorways. The recessed eight-paneled wooden door that leads from this small vestibule to the main interior hallway has side lights (with low wooden panels below) and a transom with elliptical designs. Other exterior wooden doors - both double and single - are either paneled or glazed, and generally have large louvered shutters. Over the four- and eight-paneled wooden doors of the rear wing are three-light transoms.

- b. Windows and shutters: The windows of the main First Street facade extend to the floor; they have double-hung wooden sash with nine-over-nine lights. The windows of the "hexagonal" library wing have segmental heads and double-hung wooden sash with two-over-two lights. In general, the remaining windows have square heads and double-hung wooden sash with two-over-two or four-over-four lights. All windows have exterior, louvered, wooden shutters.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roofs with slate shingles over both the main block and two-part rear wing.
- b. Cornices: The bracketed entablature of the main block has a plain architrave, a high plain frieze, and a box-like cornice. Other cornices are not bracketed, and, in general, have smaller proportions.

C. Detailed Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: Modified side-hall plan with narrow rear wing with galleries.
- 2. Stairways: A single-run, open-string stairway in the main hall has two turned wooden balusters at each tread, a large turned wooden newel post, and a large molded wooden handrail. There is also a winder staircase at the end of the rear wing.
- 3. Flooring: In general, the floors are of uniform-width wooden boards.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are finished with smooth plaster. The main hallway and the dining room also are wallpapered.

5. Doorways and doors: The prominent doors and doorways of the first floor all have crossetted Greek Revival architraves. Above these architraves are narrow moldings and low pediments with decorative scrollwork and acroteria. The wooden doors generally have six panels. (Only the first-floor rooms of the main block were accessible at the time of this recording.)
6. Decorative features and trim: Each of the major rooms of the first floor has a wide, elaborate molded cornice and a large decorative plaster medallion in the middle of the ceiling. One of the most notable decorative features of the Brevard House is the flattened elliptical archway that separates the double parlors. The moldings, rosettes, and supporting scroll-brackets are all fine examples of the decorative vocabulary of the Greek Revival at mid-century.
7. Lighting: The elaborate mid-nineteenth-century chandeliers are wired for modern electric lighting - as is the entire structure.

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D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house, located in New Orleans' urban-residential Garden District, faces southwest, and is situated close to the concrete public sidewalks.
2. Landscaping: There is a formal garden to the southeast side of the house.

"The front portion of the . . . garden has a formal arrangement featuring four garden figures. There is also a bird bath backed with a long bed containing cherry laurels (*Prunus Laurocerasus*), yews (*podocarpus*), myrtles, a seasoning bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*), a large cocculus, camellias japonica, and azaleas, edged with boxwood. A huge purple bougainvillea climbs the iron lacework on the front, while the back of the gallery supports a *Quisqualis indica* vine, a tropical plant sometimes called Rangoon creeper. The bed alongside the house has camellias, multifleur, and Confederate jasmine vines (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*).

"An integral part of the landscape design is the limestone balustrade which encloses the garden and runs along the flagstone paving. There are formal boxwood parterres in the back garden and an inviting circular bench which surrounds an exceptionally large sweet olive tree (*Osmanthes fragrans*). The planting around the fish pond includes *podocarpus*, sasanquas, bottle-brush (*Callistemon lanceolatus*),

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shrimp plant (*Beloperone guttata*), loquat, viburnums,  
and barberries."

The above is quoted from Martha and Ray Samuel, The Great  
Days of the Garden District, page 51.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
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